

The Progressive Era Marks an upsurge of Reform (1901-1921)

Progressivism: Meaning and Objectives

Influencing politics in the early 20th century, progressivism was a movement to improve American life by expanding democracy and achieving economic and social justice. Progressives were optimistic and forward-looking. They generally did not seek to restore the rural America of the past, but rather they accepted urbanization and industrialization. They hailed the benefits of the machine age but sought to correct its evils.

- Political Reforms: Shocked by the sorry state of everyday politics progressives planned:
 - To wipe out such practices as graft, machine politics, and business domination of government
 - To set up political procedures to assure the people closer control over the government

The remedy for the evils of democracy, progressives believed, is more democracy.

- **Social and Economic Reforms:** Appalled by the poverty afflicting many Americans, progressives planned:
 - To eliminate practices harming farmers, workers, tenement dwellers, and consumers
 - To expand government regulation over our economy so as to further the public interest

Sources of Progressive Strength

- **Farmers:** Although they had abandoned the Populist party, farmers retained the Populist heritage. They wanted tighter regulation of railroads, lower tariffs, and easier credit.
- **Urban Middle Class:** Many professional people, storekeepers, and small business owners were alarmed by the power of giant trusts and political machines. They favored lower tariffs, more government regulation of industry, and the extension of democracy.
- **Workers:** Laborers looked to the government for laws regulating work by women and children, protecting workers from dangerous machinery, and easing financial hardships caused by industrial accidents.
- **Writers:** Critics analyzed American society and wrote of the need for reform. These writers

included Frank Norris, Gustavus Myers, Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, Upton Sinclair, and Lincoln Steffens; they are generally known as *muckrakers*.

- Political Leaders: Progressives were found not only in the short-lived Progressive party of 1912, but more significantly in both major parties. Progressive leaders achieved office and furthered reform at all levels of government.

Major Progressive Leaders

Tom Johnson	Democrat	Mayor of Cleveland
Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones	Republican Independent	Mayor of Toledo
Robert La Follette	Republican	Governor of WI
Charles Evans Hughes	Republican	Governor of NY
Hiram Johnson	Republican	Governor of CA
Theodore Roosevelt	Republican	President of US
Woodrow Wilson	Democrat	President of US

Accomplishments of The Progressive Movement

- Political Reforms
 - City and State Action
 - *Direct primaries* enabled voters rather than party bosses to nominate candidates
 - *Corrupt practices laws* regulated political contributions and campaign spending
 - The *Australian ballot* allowed citizens to vote in secrecy

- The *initiative* and *referendum* provided voters with a greater voice in making laws
 - The *recall* enabled voters to oust unsatisfactory elected public officials
 - The *commission* and *city manager* forms of municipal government reduced the power of political machines
 - Municipal and state *civil service examinations* reduced the number of positions available to political machines for patronage
 - *Women suffrage* in the states extended democracy
- Federal Action
 - *Direct election of Senators* was achieved by the Seventeenth Amendment(1913)
 - *Nationwide women suffrage* was guaranteed by the Nineteenth Amendment (1920)
- Social and Economic Reform
 - City and State Action
 - *State regulation of intrastate railroads and public utilities* improved service and reduced rates

- *Consumer protection laws* assured honest weights and unadulterated foods
- *Fair tax laws*, by taxing incomes, relieved the burden on owners of real estate
- *Child labor laws* set a minimum age for employment and prohibited children from working in dangerous occupations
- *Labor laws affecting women* set minimum wages and maximum hours for female workers
- *Welfare benefits* were enacted for dependent children, widows, and the aged
- *Factory inspection laws* improved sanitation, lighting, and safety
- *Workers' compensation laws* protected workers and their families in case of on-the-job accidents

○ Federal Action

- Expanded federal *regulation of railroads, industrial combinations, and banks* protected the public interest
- *Conservation measures* preserved America's natural resources
- *Consumer protection laws* required pure food and drugs

- An *income tax* was authorized by the Sixteenth Amendment (1913)
- *Legitimate union activities* were exempted from antitrust prosecution, and the use of injunctions in labor disputes was limited
- Federal funds were used for long-term, low-interest *loans to help farmers*

Weakness of the Progressive Movement

- Uneven Pattern of Reform: In some states, the progressives achieved very little; in other states, with vigorous leaders, the progressives achieved much. The leading progressive states included New York, New Jersey, California, Oregon, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin.
- Court Roadblocks: The courts at first held illegal considerable progressive legislation affecting economic matters such as minimum wages for women. The states claimed that such laws were a valid exercise of the states' "police powers." The courts, however, frequently ruled that such laws violated the "due process" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.
- Survival of Political Machines: The progressives failed to end the power of political machines.

Party bosses learned to evade the reform laws. The progressives were unable permanently to overcome public apathy, which continued to be the greatest enemy of successful democratic government.

Disappearance of the Progressive Movement

By the early 1920s, progressivism had died out because many progressive reforms had become law and the public had lost its enthusiasm for further reforms. Also, the American people had turned their attention from domestic matters to foreign affairs with the coming of World War I. After the war, Americans were tired of public affairs and looked on reform with apathy.

Heritage of the Progressive Movement

- The progressives promoted the belief that government has the responsibility to act for the people's welfare. The Progressive Era marked the transition from laissez-faire to government regulation of the economy.
- The progressives demonstrated the ability of our democratic institutions to meet problems arising out of urbanization and industrialization. Further, they showed the need for tackling such problems

on the city and state levels as well as on the federal level.

- The progressives believed that a President should provide strong and effective national leadership. This concept was illustrated, for the first time since the days of Abraham Lincoln, by both progressive Presidents: Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

***THEODORE ROOSEVELT ADMINISTRATION:
1901-1909 (REPUBLICAN)
THE "SQUARE DEAL"***

- **Major Political and Economic Aspects**
 - Roosevelt Becomes President
President McKinley was assassinated after his second inauguration.
 - Roosevelt's Background and Personality
 - A member of a prominent family and a graduate of Harvard, Roosevelt early decided upon a career in politics.
 - Experience serving as New York State Assembly member, a federal civil service commissioner, a New York City police commissioner, and assistant secretary of the Navy. Organized and led volunteer regiment, the *Rough Riders*, and was elected governor of

New York in 1898 achieving civil service and tax reforms, and demonstrated his independence from state Republican leaders.

- Roosevelt's Views

- Strong Leadership: Considered himself morally bound as President to further the interests of the people. Focused attention upon national problems and won public support for progressive solutions. Proposed the *stewardship theory*.
- "Square Deal": Roosevelt believed that the government should:
 - ✓ assure honesty and fairness in both government and business.
 - ✓ give greater economic opportunity to the individual. He proclaimed that the theme of his administration was to afford all groups-business leaders, laborers, farmers, and consumers-*a square deal*.

- Election of 1904

- Defeating Judge Alton B. Parker, he used voter mandate to secure significant progressive legislation.

- Roosevelt's Relationship to Progressivism
 - Did not create progressive movement, but supported reforms as essential to save our democratic, capitalist system from both the extreme left and the extreme right. Opposed Socialists and other radicals who urged an end to private enterprise while, at the same time, he condemned those persons of wealth who resisted change and who abused their power. Roosevelt represented the middle-class progressives, whose method was moderate reform.
- Roosevelt Provides Vigorous Government
 - Curbing "Bad" Trusts: Roosevelt approved "good" trusts but condemned "bad" trusts. Supreme Court smashed the Northern Securities Company owned by Morgan and Hill giving Roosevelt the reputation as a "trust buster."
 - Settling the Anthracite Coal Strike (1902): United Mine Workers struck in 1902 for union recognition, shorter hours, and higher wages. With coal scarce and winter approaching, Roosevelt sought solution between John

Mitchell (Union Chief) and the mine-owners. Owners refused to settle by arbitration causing Roosevelt to threaten seizure of mines. Result was wage increases and shorter working hours but denial of union recognition. In contrast to Cleveland during the Pullman strike, Roosevelt emerged as a friend of labor. He also set a precedent for expanded Presidential powers.

- Conserving Natural Resources: Having lived in the West and observing the depletion of natural resources, Roosevelt
 - ✓ Increased national reserves of forests, coal lands, and waterpower sites
 - ✓ Secured passage of the *Newlands Act (1902)* to finance irrigation projects
 - ✓ Encouraged conservation efforts of Forest Service, directed by Gifford Pinchot
 - ✓ In 1908 held a Governors' Conference to promote conservation

- Protecting the Consumer and the Railroad User:
 - ✓ Pure Food and Drug Act (1906):
Protect the consumer
 - ✓ Meat Inspection Act (1906):
Protect the consumer
 - ✓ Hepburn Act (1906): Expanded the powers of the Interstate Commerce Commission

- **Significant Foreign Affairs**

Roosevelt saw the United States as a major power within the interdependent world. His foreign policy of “speak softly and carry a big stick” led to the modernization of the army, building a strong navy, and pursuing an active foreign policy.

- Revolt in Panama (1903): Aided a successful revolt against Columbia; U.S. by treaty gained control over the Panama Canal Zone.
- Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904): This statement declared the U.S. as the international policeman of the Western Hemisphere. It arose from debt disputes and defaults in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic.

- Settlement of the Russo-Japanese War (1905): Roosevelt brought about a peaceful end to the war at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Received Nobel Peace Prize in 1906 for action.
- Gentlemen's Agreement (1907): Halted immigration of laborers from Japan through negotiations.

TAFT ADMINISTRATION: 1909-1913 (REPUBLICAN)

- Major Political Aspects
 - Election of 1908: Chosen by T. Roosevelt, Republican convention nominated Howard Taft as GOP presidential candidate. He promised to continue Roosevelt's policies. Taft defeated the Democratic candidate W. J. Bryan running for his third and last time.
 - Taft: Background and Personality: Served as federal judge, governor of the Philippines, and secretary of war-all appointive positions that provided little experience in dealing with legislators and voters. Taft lacked the personality to do battle with Congress along with possessing the opinion that the President's role should be limited and thus unwilling to use fully executive powers. He did recognize the need for further progressive measures. Taft would later serve as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (1921-1930).
- Taft Antagonizes the Progressives
 - Tariff Issue: Called special session to lower tariff rates. By not fighting fully Senate protectionist, Taft alienated the progressive Republicans (known as "insurgents") upon signing the Payne-Aldrich Tariff.

- Conservation Issue: Supported secretary of interior, Richard Ballinger vs. Gifford Pinchot, head of the Forest Service. Even though Taft favored conservation, this incident furthered the breach between himself and the progressives.
- Issue of Reform in the House of Representatives: Taft failed to support Republican progressives in effort to limit power of the Speaker of the House, conservative Joseph G. ("Uncle Joe") Cannon. Regardless, Republican insurgents and Democrats joined to end Cannon's dictatorial rule by stripping the Speaker of his power to appoint House committee members and excluded Cannon from membership on the powerful Rules Committee.

Taft's handling increased division between the "Old Guard" conservatives and the insurgents of the Republican party.

- Split Between Taft and Roosevelt: Roosevelt supported the insurgents while Taft leaned toward the Old Guard. Differences in personality further increased political issues leading to friends becoming enemies. Roosevelt entered the election of 1912 with the Bull Moose party.

- Important Domestic Legislation:
 - Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act(1909): Maintained high import duties.
 - Mann-Elkins Act(1910): Authorized the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate telephone and telegraph companies.
 - Physical valuation Act(1913): Empowered the Interstate Commerce Commission to determine the value of each railroad's property as a basis for setting fair rates.
- Significant Foreign Affairs: Taft encouraged Americans to look for investment and trade opportunities in Latin America, especially Honduras, Haiti, and Nicaragua. Sent marines to Nicaragua (1911) to protect investments. Using both diplomatic and military support to protect US interests was called "Dollar Diplomacy."

WILSON ADMINISTRATION: 1913-1921 (DEMOCRATIC)-THE "NEW FREEDOM"

- Major Political Aspects
 - Election of 1912: Taft dominated Republican convention winning nomination. Roosevelt's supporters claimed fraud and created the Progressive party with Roosevelt as their nominee. The Democrats, after a

bitter battle between conservatives and progressives nominated Woodrow Wilson.

- Many points of the Roosevelt and Wilson programs were similar: increased political democracy, social reforms, and economic reforms.
- Differences were:
 - ✓ Roosevelt favored high tariffs, considered business consolidation inevitable, and urged that giant corporations be permitted but under government regulation.
 - ✓ Wilson favored lower tariffs, opposed business consolidation, and urged the government to break up giant corporations.
 - ❖ Wilson won the election with the aid of the split Republican vote but the combination vote of Wilson and Roosevelt demonstrated a victory for progressivism.

- Wilson: Background and Personality: Son of southern minister. Wilson was highly educated and excelled in politics and public speaking. A professor of history, he did a study of American and British governments called *Congressional Government*. He was

appointed president of Princeton University in 1902 where he worked to improve education and end snobbish eating clubs on campus thus attracting the attention of the public. He was elected governor of New Jersey in 1910 and worked for progressive programs to be passed in the legislature.

A “scholar in politics,” Wilson personified intellect, reason, and logic. He was a man of high moral principles and an idealist who found it difficult to compromise on basic issues. Although Wilson lacked warmth in personal relationships, he could sway crowds by his eloquent prose and effective oratory.

○ Wilson’s Views:

- Strong Leadership: Believed President should be strong thus used executive powers to the fullest. In 1913 he called a special session and appeared personally before Congress-a practice unused since Jefferson- to request legislation. He used patronage to gain Senate votes, and appealed to the people gaining public support to influence Congressional members. For his leadership in securing legislation, Wilson is rated a highly successful President.

- “New Freedom”: A Progressive Program:
Wilson distrusted extremes of great wealth and radical agitation. He desired to preserve and strengthen our democratic, capitalistic society by progressive reforms: *lower tariffs, an improved banking system, stronger regulation of business, and protection for unions and workers.*

Wilson Administration: Important Domestic Legislation

<u>Laws</u>	<u>Purposes</u>
Underwood Tariff Act (1913)	Reduce tariff rates; institute an income tax.
Federal Reserve Act (1913)	Create an effective national banking system.
Clayton Act (1914)	Strengthen antitrust regulations; exempt unions from antitrust suits; limit injunctions in labor disputes.
Federal Trade Commission Act (1914)	Prevent unfair business practices.
La Follette Seamen's Act (1915)	Improved working conditions on American merchant vessels.
Adamson Act (1916)	Established an eight-hour day for railroad Workers.
Federal Farm Loan Act (1916)	Provide low-interest loans for farmers.

- Election of 1916: Wilson defeated Charles Evans Hughes. Both had progressive viewpoints, but Wilson won reelection with the slogan “He kept us out of war.” Nevertheless, the US entered the war in 1917. As America focused its energies on war the reforms of domestic issues slowed and with it the Progressive Era came to an end.

- Significant Foreign Affairs
 - Difficulties with Mexico: Wilson takes office with Mexico in the middle of a revolution. Refusing to recognize the military regime of *General Huerta*, Wilson chose a foreign policy of “*watchful waiting*.” After a dispute involving American sailors, Wilson ordered the navy to occupy the port of Vera Cruz. With US support, the reformer Carranza became President of Mexico.
 - In 1916 Wilson ordered General John J. Pershing (Black Jack) to enter Mexico to hunt down Pancho Villa, who had raided into Brownsville, Texas. Troops were withdrawn in 1917 and Carranza was recognized as the *de jure* (rightful) government.
 - Interest in the Caribbean: Wilson claimed to oppose “dollar diplomacy,” but continued Taft’s policies in Nicaragua as well as sending troops into Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In 1917 we paid Denmark \$25 million for the Virgin Islands to further protect the Panama Canal.
 - World War I: In 1914 Wilson maintained neutrality while Europe burned. He protested violations of our “freedom of the

seas” both by English warships and German U-Boats. In 1917, as a result of Germany’s *unrestricted submarine warfare*, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war.

- Wilson proposed his idealistic *Fourteen Points* for postwar settlement. He helped draw up the *Treaty of Versailles*, and incorporated in its plan for a *League of Nations*. To gain support for the treaty, Wilson went on a speaking tour, which ended when he suffered a paralytic stroke. Thereafter, the Senate rejected the treaty.
- Wilson Administration After World War I (1918-1921)
 - End of the Progressive Movement:
Progressive spirit disappeared as:
 - Popular attention centered upon the treaty of Versailles.
 - Wilson fell seriously ill and no longer could provide effective leadership.
 - The last measures reflecting progressive influence were the Eighteenth Amendment (prohibition) and the Nineteenth Amendment (woman suffrage).
 - Transitions to a Peacetime Economy and Labor Strife: As the government ended

wartime controls, the cost of living rose sharply, leading to postwar inflation. In an effort to maintain living standards, labor unions called for a series of strikes. Both the steelworkers and the Boston police lost in their efforts. The coal miners won a partial victory. Equating strikes with radicalism, public opinion turned against labor unions.

- Public Hysteria: The “Red Scare.”: Alarmed by Communist takeover of Russia in 1917, the American people feared “Red” threats within the US. Attorney General *A. Mitchell Palmer* conducted raids seeking subversive aliens and Communists. He had arrested and held innocent persons, often in violation of their Constitutional rights. By 1920, public hysteria subsided.